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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001182

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: MANY JORDANIANS REMAIN PESSIMISTIC ABOUT  
NETANYAHU, NEW PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Reaction from our contacts and the Jordanian press on Israeli PM Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington has been typically pessimistic. While President Obama's engagement on the issue is praised, many believe that Netanyahu is not committed to peace and can rely upon pro-Israel pressure groups to win over critics in Washington. Contacts are similarly pessimistic about the new Palestinian government, which they see as weak and unable to speak for the fractured power centers of the Palestinian population. A Knesset bill which would paint Jordan as a Palestinian state has received predictably vocal and dismissive reviews. End Summary.

Reaction to Netanyahu's Washington Visit  
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¶2. (U) Press coverage of the meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu focused primarily on the need for further pressure on Israel. Most commentators applaud the perceived change in emphasis in Washington's approach, but caution that without meaningful follow-through and concrete improvements in conditions, any gains will be temporary. Pundits and nongovernmental contacts continue to view Netanyahu and his government with great suspicion and doubt that he has the political will to advance the cause of peace. Many noted that the words "two state solution" never appeared in Netanyahu's statement. Abdullah Abu Rumman, a columnist for the government-owned Al-Rai newspaper, theorized that "the American president succumbed to an explicit Israeli process of extortion that allowed Netanyahu to evade any commitments to the two state solution."

¶3. (C) Several of our contacts are carefully following the stances of pro-Israel interest groups in the United States in the hope that a rift will open up between them and the Netanyahu government. The influence of the "Israel lobby" on American politics, a source of many conspiracy theories in Jordan, continues to produce a great deal of doubt among Jordanian analysts that any movement towards peace will ultimately take place. Muslim Brotherhood chief Hamam Said voiced a commonly held view on May 20 when he said that "the Zionists have many pressure tools in the United States" and the expectation that Netanyahu's policies would change was "naive." Contacts are hopeful that the recent shift in rhetoric, which many Jordanians see as favoring the Arab Peace Initiative, signals a weakening of Israel's influence in American domestic politics.

¶4. (C) While the Palestinian issue remains the major focus of Jordanian reaction to the Obama-Netanyahu meeting, many of our contacts are also talking about Iran as well. MP Saleh Al-Zu'bi told Poloff that he was worried about the United States "following Israel into war" with Iran, and saw little in the press conference to suggest that there was a difference of opinion between the two countries in how to address the spread of Iranian influence.

15. (C) Local press reporting on the formation of a new Palestinian government was mostly factual, with very little commentary. Our contacts, however, see the new government as the latest chapter in a series of weak Palestinian governments dictated by outside powers rather than the will of the Palestinian people themselves. Umran Al-Khatib of the Palestinian Arab Front party questioned the utility of a Palestinian government when negotiations between Hamas and Fatah have not yet been resolved. Khatib said that Abu Mazen's message to Hamas, "we can go on without you," ultimately has no basis in reality, as the political base of the Palestinian Authority is non-existent for all intents and purposes. Commenting on the continuance of Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister, Khatib said that Fayyad was selected in advance of Abu Mazen's visit to Washington as a known quantity who is acceptable to the United States. Palestinian businessman Jamal Iqteish painted Fayyad as a "place holder" rather than a long-term choice. He also noted that there are "many lobbies and power centers" in Palestinian politics, and that Fayyad only represented one of them.

Knesset Bill on the "Jordan Option"  
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16. (U) Islamist politicians and government officials in Jordan reacted with characteristic outrage against a proposal submitted to the Knesset by MK Arie Elad which would recognize Jordan as a Palestinian state. Islamist daily As-Sabeel called the proposal a "Zionist hallucination," and

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the Muslim Brotherhood-lined Islamic Action Front claimed that the motion "aims to move the (Israeli-Palestinian) conflict to Jordan." Government spokesman Nabil Al-Sharif called the move a "ridiculous falsehood that is not worthy of any discussion on our part." Members of parliament vowed to bring the issue forward for discussion before the lower house's foreign affairs committee.  
Beecroft